



Department  
for Education

# **Ad-hoc Notice** **School preferences**

**Analysis of secondary school-level  
applications and offers data by school  
type, England, 2019**

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**February 2020**

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## Summary

Analysis of school preference data from 2014 to 2019 finds that over this period grammar schools were a popular choice for parents in the areas that have selective schools. In the recent 2019 data, compared to schools of any Ofsted rating, Outstanding schools (both grammar and non-selective) were a more popular choice for parents.

## Introduction

This report presents new analysis of applications and offers data for September 2019 entry to secondary schools in England (also known as “preference data”) on parents’ choices of school for their children. School preference data provides a way of looking at the “relative demand” for different schools and types of schools within the choices available to parents as expressed through the application process.

## Methodology

The data comes from the application and offer process undertaken by local authorities which enabled them to send out offers of a place in a secondary school to all applicants on the national offer day of 1 March 2019. The inclusion of a school by an applicant as one of their preferences does not mean that they meet the admissions criteria for that school. This includes, but is not limited to, grammar schools. Offers are not necessarily taken up but applications and offers are the best proxy for demand that is available. Details of the data can be found in the source section at the end of this document.

This analysis comprises three elements:

1. A comparison of the number of first preferences for state-funded fully selective schools (“grammar schools”) expressed by parents with the number of places offered by these schools<sup>1</sup>.
2. A comparison of the number of first preferences against the number of places offered in grammar and non-selective schools, which is also repeated to cover only outstanding schools. Both of these comparisons are with parental preferences for all non-selective schools, not just within selective local authority areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Applications and offers are the best proxy for demand that is available. However, it is possible that a number of applications for selective schools related to pupils who had not yet passed the 11 plus tests despite the DfE School Admissions Code 2014 being clear that “admission authorities must take all reasonable steps to inform parents of the outcome of selection tests before the closing date for secondary applications on 31 October so as to allow parents time to make an informed choice of school – while making clear that this does not equate to a guarantee of a selective place.”  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/389388/School\\_Admissions\\_Code\\_2014\\_-\\_19\\_Dec.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/389388/School_Admissions_Code_2014_-_19_Dec.pdf)

3. A comparison over time (2014 to 2019) of the number of first preferences and number of places offered in grammar and non-selective schools.

## **Section 1: The number of first preferences for state-funded grammar schools compared with the number of places offered by these schools**

There were 37,786 first preferences expressed by parents for 25,827 places offered in the 163 grammar schools in 2019<sup>2</sup>. Using the relationship between the number of first preferences and the number of places offered for a school as a measure of demand, for grammar schools there is an excess in demand of 11,959 places. In 2019, for every 15 pupils that chose a grammar school as their first preference, around 10 places were offered.

## **Section 2: Comparing the demand-supply ratio for grammar schools with that for non-selective schools**

Table 1 below shows a comparison of first preferences relative to places offered for grammar and non-selective schools. The first preference demand for grammar schools, relative to supply, is 49 per cent greater than for non-selective schools.

Table 2 below is based on schools which were rated outstanding by Ofsted for data up to 31 March 2019<sup>3</sup> and compares first preference applications per place available in grammar and non-selective schools. That comparison was undertaken to allow for the fact that most grammar schools are rated outstanding, so that a more like-with-like indicative comparison can be made with similarly rated non-selective schools.

Compared to schools of any Ofsted rating, Outstanding schools have higher demand-supply ratios. This indicates that, relative to the number of places offered, more first preference choices were expressed for Outstanding schools than other schools. This is also true when comparing Outstanding grammar schools to non-selective schools. As a proportion, grammar schools of all Ofsted ratings had a demand-supply ratio that was higher than the group of Outstanding non-selective schools.

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<sup>2</sup> These figures include boarding places

<sup>3</sup> [State-funded schools' inspections and outcomes as at 31 March 2019](#)

Table 3 shows the number of first preferences, places offered and demand-supply ratio time series from 2014 to 2019 for grammar and non-selective schools.

The demand-supply ratio decreased for grammar schools over the period 2014 to 2017. A naïve interpretation of this would be that the demand for grammar school places decreased. In fact, the number of times grammar schools were a first preference choice increased by 1.8% from 2014 to 2017 but, at the same time, the number of places offered by grammar schools increased by 9.7%. Between 2017 and 2019 the number of first preferences for grammar schools increased by 7.3% and the number of places they offered increased by 3.2%. Over the period, the demand-supply ratio for grammar schools has remained consistently high. The relatively small number of grammar schools and places they offer means that there is some volatility in the demand-supply measure.

The relationship between the number of first preferences a school receives and the number of offers it makes is not an absolute measure of demand. It acts as an illustrative proxy, but when looking at the demand-supply ratio over time, it should be interpreted alongside the individual changes in the number of places offered and the number of first preferences expressed by parents.

**Table 1: First preferences of parents compared to the number of places offered by state-funded schools 2019**

School type	Non-selective schools			Grammar schools			All schools	Number of non-selective schools <sup>^*</sup>	Number of grammar schools <sup>^*</sup>	Total number of schools <sup>^*</sup>
	Total number of places offered	Times put as 1st preference	Demand-Supply ratio	Total number of places offered	Times put as 1st preference	Demand-Supply ratio	Demand-Supply ratio			
Academy Converter	276,531	288,425	1.04	22,586	33,501	1.48	1.08	1,341	143	1,484
Academy Sponsor Led	130,386	112,027	0.86	-	-	-	0.86	713	0	713
Community School	67,438	63,863	0.95	1,309	1,653	1.26	0.95	343	9	352
Foundation School	33,478	29,808	0.89	927	1,110	1.20	0.90	172	6	178
Free Schools	22,497	24,732	1.10	-	-	-	1.10	173	0	173
Voluntary Aided School	39,728	41,003	1.03	848	1,347	1.59	1.04	230	6	236
Voluntary Controlled School	5,924	5,675	0.96	157	175	1.11	0.96	29	1	30
<b>All school types</b>	<b>575,982</b>	<b>565,533</b>	<b>0.98</b>	<b>25,827</b>	<b>37,786</b>	<b>1.46</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>3,001</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>3,166</b>

**Table 2: First preferences of parents compared to the number of places offered by outstanding state-funded schools 2019**

School type	Non-selective schools			Grammar schools			All schools	Number of non-selective schools^*	Number of grammar schools^*	Total number of schools^*
	Total number of places offered	Times put as 1st preference	Demand-Supply ratio	Total number of places offered	Times put as 1st preference	Demand-Supply ratio	Demand-Supply ratio			
Academy Converter	76,291	98,899	1.30	19,328	29,647	1.53	1.34	339	120	459
Academy Sponsor Led	12,907	16,856	1.31	-	-	-	1.31	63	0	63
Community School	10,580	12,799	1.21	946	1,396	1.48	1.23	47	6	53
Foundation School	2,713	3,273	1.21	415	428	1.03	1.18	12	3	15
Free Schools	3,829	6,310	1.65	-	-	-	1.65	28	0	28
Voluntary Aided School	9,554	12,056	1.26	848	1,347	1.59	1.29	52	6	58
Voluntary Controlled School	946	1,030	1.09	-	-	-	1.09	4	0	4
<b>All school types</b>	<b>116,820</b>	<b>151,223</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>21,537</b>	<b>32,818</b>	<b>1.52</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>680</b>

**Table 3: Time series of first preferences of parents compared to the number of places offered by state-funded schools 2014 to 2019**

	Non-selective schools			Grammar schools			All schools	Number of non-selective schools <sup>^*</sup>	Number of grammar schools <sup>^*</sup>	Total number of schools <sup>^*</sup>
	Total number of places offered	Times put as 1st preference	Demand-Supply ratio	Total number of places offered	Times put as 1st preference	Demand-Supply ratio	Demand-Supply ratio			
2014	496,426	485,408	0.98	22,821	34,595	1.52	1.00	2,900	165	3,065
2015	509,151	497,737	0.98	23,621	34,526	1.46	1.00	2,930	165	3,095
2016	522,308	511,634	0.98	24,491	35,385	1.44	1.00	2,947	165	3,112
2017	536,292	525,844	0.98	25,026	35,216	1.41	1.00	2,956	166	3,122
2018	555,062	544,664	0.98	25,593	36,968	1.44	1.00	2,990	166	3,156
2019	575,982	565,533	0.98	25,827	37,786	1.46	1.00	3,001	165	3,166



## Sources of data:

More detail on the collection methods and wider analysis of application and offer data can be found in [Secondary and primary school applications and offers 2019](#)

The application and offer data is gathered at pupil level and aggregated by the department into the local authority level data provided in this publication. The original data being at pupil level allows us to produce school level figures of the number of applications received and the preference level of offers made. It is the school level data that has been used to calculate the above tables.

Contact the department at [school.preference@education.gov.uk](mailto:school.preference@education.gov.uk) for more information about accessing this dataset.

Ofsted inspection outcomes from State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 March 2019

## Methodology:

Using the secondary phase pupil preference data, “times put as 1<sup>st</sup> preference” was divided by the “total number of places offered” to find the Demand-Supply ratio for each grouping in the tables above. Schools with a school type of “N/A” and schools offering zero places were excluded from the analysis.

- indicates no data in this group.

^ schools that offer day boarding or termly boarding places have these recorded in additional rows in the preferences data, so these figures are not the same as the number of schools

\* school totals apply to schools with year 7 (or year 9) entry (so exclude all-through schools, middle deemed secondary schools etc.)<sup>4</sup>

## Coverage:

State-funded mainstream schools admitting pupils to secondary phase

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<sup>4</sup> Some all-through schools have been retained where offers have been made or a significant number of preferences made.



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